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SUBJECT: G/TIP VISIT REVIEWS PARAGUAY'S EFFORTS

1. Summary: On December 6, 7, and 8, G/TIP Senior Reporting Officer Linda Brown visited Paraguay as part of a four-country tour of South America. In meetings with Embassy officers, GOP officials, and representatives of NGOs, Brown discussed Paraguay's progress in combating trafficking in persons since the most recent TIP Report, which classified Paraguay as a "Tier 2 Watch List" country. The two dominant themes of discussion were Paraguayan efforts to prosecute traffickers and the development of services for trafficking victims repatriated to Paraguay. During the visit, interlocutors stressed the high profile that TIP has assumed among GOP officers over the past 18 months, but also acknowledged the deficiencies in Paraguay's anti-TIP efforts that the GOP must continue to remedy. End summary.

2. Brown had a number of meetings with various officials and NGOs, raising a number of issues in Paraguay's efforts to combat TIP.

3. Ambassador Keane

--The Ambassador reviewed Post's engagement of the GOP on TIP, focusing upon efforts to encourage the Attorney General's office, the Supreme Court, and the Foreign Ministry to supply data on arrests and prosecutions and urge prosecutors to be more aggressive on TIP cases.

--The Ambassador also described Post's \$155,000 bilateral project with the Secretariat for Women and the Secretariat for Children and Adolescents, focusing upon its prospects for improving the quality of services available to rescued trafficking victims.

--Brown explained the purpose of her regional visit to Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru, noting that she sought to review the progress that these Tier 2 countries have made since the publication of the 2004 TIP Report. She agreed on the centrality of encouraging prosecutions of traffickers, and pointed out that G/TIP plans to become more aggressive in engaging countries on law enforcement.

4. USAID Mission Deputy Director Sergio Guzman, Democracy Team Leader Steve Marma, Developmental Assistance Specialist for Maternal Health Josceline Betancourt

--Guzman and Betancourt work with health programs in Paraguay, and noted that TIP has health implications in Paraguay, ranging from early pregnancy to sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS) and mental disorders. Brown discussed the link between prostitution and sex trafficking, observing that legalized prostitution increases the number of women trafficked into sex slavery, and leads to the spread of these health problems.

--Marma described NGO activities in Paraguay, pointing out that NGOs, and civil society generally, have not always been successful in working with the GOP, which views them more as competitors than as partners.

5. Foreign Ministry Director of International Organizations Julio Peralta

--Peralta described the interministerial working group on TIP, which he chairs. He discussed the state of the GOP's national action plan on trafficking, which it presented in early 2004. He reviewed the visit of Juan Miguel Petit, the UN's special rapporteur on child sex abuse.

--Peralta was the only GOP official to ask directly about Paraguay's prospective tier placement on the next annual report. Brown indicated that tier placements will not be contemplated until well into 2005, and that her trip was only a preliminary effort at gathering information for the next TIP Report.

--He also discussed the Interamerican Development Bank's trafficking project with the GOP, which focuses upon studies to determine the extent of TIP here and the most common routes used by traffickers.

¶6. Minister for Women Maria Jose Argana

--The Minister discussed Post's bilateral TIP project and the timetable the Secretariats for Women and Children and Adolescents developed.

--She noted her working relationship with Phillip Linderman (a former G/TIP reporting officer for South America now detailed to the OAS, where he is organizing an anti-trafficking program), and noted that she would be visiting Washington during the first half of 2005 and hoped to meet with G/TIP officials while there.

¶7. Minister for Children and Adolescents Mercedes Britez de Buzo

--The Minister described efforts to combat the trafficking in children, pointing to participation in Embassy Montevideo's regional project, participation in the Embassy's bilateral project, and efforts to criminalize child pornography.

--She hinted at the continued tug of war with Women's Ministry over leadership of anti-TIP initiatives within the GOP, contradicting Minister Argana by claiming that most Paraguayan trafficking victims are younger than 18.

-- She spoke of the need to prosecute traffickers but conceded, based upon her own experiences as a prosecutor and judge, that it is not career enhancing in the judicial system to focus on trafficking or children's issues.

¶8. International Programs Coordinator of the Secretariat for Repatriations Luz Gamelia Ibarra

--The meeting was principally a general discussion of the history of the Secretariat for Repatriations and the challenges of repatriating Paraguayan women trafficked overseas. Gamelia discussed GOP efforts to cooperate with Spain and Argentina in specific 2004 cases, such as the women trafficked from Villarica to Spain, and two minor girls from Coronel Oviedo rescued from forced prostitution in Cordoba, Argentina. She discussed plans to create an "attention center" to serve trafficking victims seeking reintegration into Paraguay society.

--Gamelia described the Secretariat's cooperation with local bus companies especially La Encarnacena in securing free transportation of TIP victims from Argentina back to Paraguay.

--Gamelia noted the Secretariat's difficulty in repatriating victims from Spain because of the cost.

¶9. Attorney General Oscar Latorre and Prosecutor Teresa Martinez

--Latorre offered general remarks about the importance of stopping trafficking, but was not positive about prospects for the creation of a specialized unit of anti-trafficking prosecutors.

--Martinez described the history of TIP prosecutions in Paraguay, observing that the issue was unknown just 18 months ago, and is now an important focus in the Ministerio Publico. She mentioned several ongoing cases, including the GOP's efforts to prosecute traffickers in the Villarica (which has since resulted in two convictions and prison sentences) and Coronel Oviedo cases.

--Brown explained the origins of the USG's interest in obtaining data on prosecutions. Martinez noted that she is working on the project in the Attorney General's Office. The task has been difficult because there is no central repository for the data. Instead data must be obtained from individual prosecutors. Martinez described the difficulties in getting victims to cooperate, and the Attorney General's lack of legal authority to investigate independently.

¶10. Independent Women's Rights Activist and Consultant Andrea Cid

--The discussion primarily dealt with Paraguayan culture and the ways in which it complicates both government and NGO efforts to fight trafficking. In the eyes of many here, prostitution is not a bad thing in and of itself. Given the levels of stark poverty in the country, many feel that prostitution is a legitimate way to earn a living. Many families, she said, knowingly sell their own daughters into prostitution abroad in the hope that the girls will send money home.

--The legal culture in Paraguay complicates efforts to stop trafficking. She described the Penal Code and the entire judicial system as lenient, with laws prescribing mild penalties for crimes such as trafficking. The authorities are unable to stop traffickers from threatening victims who file complaints with prosecutors.

11. Comment: Paraguay needs to place emphasis upon law enforcement and prosecutions of traffickers. As Brown noted, other countries have arrested the owners of brothels to which Paraguayan women have been trafficked. Paraguay needs to use the information acquired in these cases to track down and prosecute the traffickers recruiting the girls in their home towns, as happened in Villarica. Nevertheless, that discussion of trafficking in Paraguay has progressed to this level illustrates the higher profile given to trafficking. It is a priority across the GOP, as the creation of an interministerial roundtable indicates. Post is contributing to Paraguayan efforts through its bilateral assistance program. We appreciate GOP efforts to supply us with data on trafficking prosecutions, and are encouraged by the conviction and sentencing of the two traffickers in Villarica.

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